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ABSTRACT

Defining communication reticence as anxiousness due to a lack of basic communication skills, a study was conducted to determine (1) whether significant differences exist in the distribution of sex roles between reticent and nonreticent populations, (2) whether reticents and nonreticents differ in masculinity and femininity, and (3) which qualities may serve as identifiers of reticence. Subjects--76 male and female students in a basic communication course, and 60 male and female students in a communication course for reticents--completed the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI), questions about their interpersonal networks, and demographic items. Results indicated a relationship between masculinity and nonreticence and, unlike communication apprehension (CA) where no relationship between femininity and CA was detected, femininity and reticence appeared to be related. The results of the discriminant analysis suggested that 94.6% of the reticents could be correctly classified using 25 items from the BSRI. This suggests the possibility of creating a screening instrument to aid in the detection of reticence. (Author/HTH)

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A STUDY OF SEX ROLES AND RETICENCE

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ABSTRACT

This study was an attempt to determine if 1) significant differences exist in the distribution of sex roles between reticent and non-reticent populations, 2) do reticents and non-reticents differ in masculinity and femininity, and 3) which qualities may serve as identifiers of reticence? The authors predicted results in the sex role measures for reticence and non-reticence would be similar. Results indicated that masculinity is related to non-reticence and, unlike communication apprehension where no relationship between femininity and CA was detected, femininity and reticence appear to be related. The results of the discriminint analysis suggested the 94.6% of the reticents could be correctly classified using 25 items from the BSRI. This suggests the possibility of creating a screening instrument to aid in the detection of reticence.

A STUDY OF SEX-ROLES AND RETICENCE

In communication research, the use of the psychological sex-role construct as a replacement for gender has become an accepted technique providing greater specificity in theory construction. Previous studies have examined sex-roles in relation to such traditional communication variables and constructs as persuasion (Montgomery & Burgoon, 1977, 1980; Copeland & Adams, 1982), self disclosure (Greenblatt, Hasenauer, & Friemuth, 1980; Pearson, 1981), nonverbal displays (LaFrance & Carmen, 1980), rhetorical sensitivity (Pearson, 1981), cognitive complexity (McMahon & Stacks, 1980), and communication apprehension (Greenblatt et al., 1980; Copeland & Adams, 1982).

Research in the area of sex-roles has begun to move away from paper-and-pencil tests to more "behavioral measures."[1] In line with this objective, the present study goes beyond the scale score determined communication apprehension (CA) construct to examine behaviorally based communication reticence. Three questions served as the basis for this study. First, do significant differences exist in the distribution of the various sex-roles between reticent and and nonreticent subpopulations? Second, do the two groups significantly differ on the subscales of the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI) (Bem, 1974)? Finally, what qualities which comprise the BSRI serve best as identifiers of reticence?

Psychological Sex Roles

The superseding of gender by psychological/cultural factors in human research has been recommended for many years. Murphy, Murphy, and Newcomb (1937) noted, "It is patent that whatever differences have as yet been found are the result, not of biological, but of cultural factors. The question of sex

differences must therefore be at least as complex as are cultural variations within our civilizations" (p. 918). In an attempt to assess these cultural differences, instruments have been developed which operationalize the constructs of masculinity, femininity, and other sex-roles (Bem, 1974; Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1975; Heilbrun, 1976; Berzin, Welling, & Wetter, 1976). Constantinople (1973) provided the two assumptions which underlie sex-role research as presently conceived: 1) masculinity and femininity are discrete constellations of traits, not polar extremes of a single continuum and 2) every person possesses both masculine and feminine traits to varying degrees.

These two assumptions provide the theoretical basis for four sex-role classifications--masculine, feminine, androgynous, and undifferentiated. The current BSRI operationalization of the four sex-roles uses median splits on the masculine and feminine subscales. Those individuals who are above the median on the masculine subscale and below on the feminine are categorized as masculine and the reverse for feminine. Androgynous persons are presently defined in terms of being above the median on both subscales, while the undifferentiated are below on both (Spence et al., 1975; Bem, 1977).

Strongly sex-typed persons have been shown to exhibit limiting traits. Bem (1977) examined the inverse relationship of femininity and self esteem. Spence et al. (1975) and Cristall and Dean (1976) found androgynous persons higher in self esteem than masculine, feminine, or undifferentiated individuals. Bem and Lenny (1976) found strongly sex-typed individuals limited in the range of new behaviors in which they would engage. In contrast to these findings, Taylor and Hall (1982) conducted a meta-analysis of over 250 studies using as their dependent variables measures of achievement and achievement values, dominance and aggression, self esteem, adjustment, ego development, and a range of other "mental health" measures. From this comprehensive review, they

concluded "insofar as the M[asculine] and F[eminine] scales differences may exist,. . . it is primarily masculinity which pays off for individuals of both sexes" (p. 3).

Reticence

Reticence, as it is presently conceptualized by Phillips and his associates (1977, 1980; Sokoloff & Phillips, 1976), is a problem of inadequate communication skills. This inadequacy manifests itself by the individual's "avoidance of and ineptitude at social interaction and public performance" (Kelly, 1982, p. 100). The reticent will often exhibit an inability to seek out, begin, or participate in social interaction, particularly with strangers. This is a change from the original conceptualization of reticence which was a "person for whom anxiety about participation in oral communication outweighs the projection of gain from the situation" (Phillips, 1968, p. 40). After additional study and reflection, Phillips concluded that the anxiety was an artifact of the self perception of inadequate communication skills rather than the causal inhibitor of social interaction. Phillips (1980) borrows an example from McCroskey to illustrate the difference between anxiety causing communication dysfunction--assumed in communication apprehension--and anxiety about lack of communication skills.

> Basketball players who clutch when shooting free throws because anxiety takes over can be presumed to have basic skills. They would not have made the team had they not been able to shoot a fair proportion of free throws to begin with. So, if anxiety impeded their ability to sink the shot, removal of the anxiety will enable them to attempt to sink the shots, but since they are not able, they will not sink them (p.107).

While the reticent may be anxious about speaking, the anxiety is assumed to be a result of a lack of communication skills.

The difference between reticence and communication apprehension (c.f. McCroskey, 1970) may be seen in how the two are operationalized. Communication apprehensive are usually assessed through a self-administered paper-and-pencil test. Reticence is assessed through an individual's self observation linked with the assessment of a trained observer.

Kelly (1982) reviews the procedures for assessing reticence.

> Those who feel they have any of the difficulties described in a handout are invited to report for an interview. At the interview, the individual is asked to provide a description of his/her behavioral difficulties, while the interviewer makes an assessment of the degree of reticence exhibited during the interview (p. 105).

The interviewer observes the interviewee to see if s/he "shakes, blushes, perspires, breaks out in hives, is taciturn, monotonic, has excessive vocalized pauses, and/or avoids eye contact. Handshakes, posture, and general demeanor and responsiveness are also observed" (Kelly, Phillips, & McKinney, 1982, p. 212).

At face, the constructs of reticence and communication apprehension have theoretical distinctions. As a practical matter, the theoretical distinctions may not be significant (Kelly, 1982). However, the assessment technique of the two differ radically. Kelly suggests this may be due to the purposes of the two assessment devices. The Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA) (McCroskey, 1970) was developed primarily as a tool for use in experimentation and research. The interview protocols for identifying the reticent were designed to identify students with a need for specialized communication training.

As noted earlier, the exploration of communication apprehension as measured by the PRCA in relation to psychological sex-roles has been examined in two previous studies (Greenblatt et al., 1980; Copeland & Adams, 1982). Copeland and Adams found that masculines--whether male or female--reported significantly less CA than did feminines--whether male or female. The major criticism of this line of research has been the reliance on paper-and-pencil dependent variables. The movement from CA to reticence is the first step toward behavioral assessment of communication dysfunctions.

Hypotheses

The present study attempts to investigate the relationship, if any, between psychological sex-roles and reticence. Persons who have not learned the communicative skills necessary to function as the majority do may also fail to display certain traits with which communication is linked. Copeland and Adams (1984) have reported a significant correlation, $r_{(85)}=.672$, $p=.0001$, $r^2=.451$ between the masculine subscale of the BSRI and the PRCA. They reported no significant relationship between the feminine subscale and the PRCA ($r_{(85)}=-.006$, $p=.2699$, $r^2=.004$). If, as Kelly has suggested, there is little practical difference between CA and reticence, Copeland's and Adams' findings may be generalizable to reticents and suggests that reticents should be significantly lower in masculinity than nonreticents with no significant difference on the feminine subscale. This generated three hypotheses:

H_1 The reticent and nonreticent groups will significantly differ in the distribution of the four sex-roles.

H_2 Nonreticents will exhibit significantly higher scores on the BSRI masculine subscale than will reticents.

H_3 No significant difference will be exhibited by the two groups on the BSRI

feminine subscale.

The final area of inquiry deals with those items from the BSRI subscales which can best predict reticence and nonreticence. Since previous research which might be suggestive is limited, no hypotheses are offered.

METHODOLOGY

Data utilized in the reported analyses were gathered from 76 students--43 males, 33 females--enrolled in a basic communication course and from 60 students--23 males, 37 females--enrolled in a communication course for reticents at an Eastern University. Data collection was undertaken during regularly scheduled class periods.

Each participant was requested to complete the Bem Sex-Role Inventory, questions about their interpersonal networks, and demographic items. Although any instrument or procedure which assesses masculinity and femininity as independent constructs would have been acceptable, the BSRI was selected for its appropriateness in identifying individuals by degree of sex typing. While the BSRI has drawn criticism (e.g., Pedhazur & Tetenbaum, 1979; Locksley and Colton, 1979), the substantive arguments against the BSRI have been discussed by Bem (Bem 1979, 1981a, 1981b). Second, the BSRI has been used in previous communication research with the variables similar to those under scrutiny, facilitating comparability of findings. Finally, factor analysis of the BSRI generally supports its construct validity (Kimlicka, Wakefield, & Friedman, 1980; Waters, Waters, & Pincus, 1977; Graudeau, 1977).

Data was processed through the use of SPSS subprograms CROSSTABS, T-TEST, and DISCRIMINANT (Nie, et al., 1975). The criterion level was set at $p<.05$.

RESULTS

Sex role was polytomized by using the calculated medians of the masculine (Md=94) and feminine (Md=98.8) subscales of the BSRI. This gross measure of sex-role orientation was adopted despite the limitations engendered in moving from interval to categorical level data (Copeland & Adams, 1984). The use of categorical sex-roles was selected as a baseline to offer a comparison point between this and the communication apprehension studies. Results of the categorization process is illustrated in Table 1. A moderate association was noted when Cramer's V was applied (V=.443). When chi square was applied to the tabled frequencies, a significant value was obtained (x^2=26.92, df=3, p<.001). Examination of the contingency table revealed that masculine and androgynous individuals tended to be more frequently in the nonreticent column while the feminine and undifferentiated tended to fall into the reticent column. The first hypothesis was supported.

The second and third hypotheses make predictions about masculine and feminine subscales. Hypothesis Two suggests that the two groups will significantly differ in their endorsement of the items from the masculine scale with the greater number of endorsement being by the nonreticents. Hypothesis Three predicts that the two groups will not differentially endorse the items on the feminine scale. An F test of sample variance was first performed to determine the appropriateness of the use of Student's t as the test statistic for these two hypotheses. The tests of the sample variance revealed that the two groups significantly varied on both the masculine (F=1.71, p=.034) and feminine (F=2.31, p= .001) subscales. The SPSS subprogram T-TEST calculates an approximation of t and an approximated degrees of freedom to be used in assessing the alpha level (Nie, et al., 1975) in such cases.

The means for the two communication groups on the masculine subscale

conform to prediction. The nonreticents were higher (x=99.89) than the reticent (x=85.76). Application of the approximated t revealed this difference to be significant (t=4.97, df=131.9, p=.001). Research Hypothesis Two was supported.

The means for the groups on the feminine subscale did not conform to prediction. Hypothesis Three was stated in null form suggesting that no significant difference would exist between the two means. The reticent mean for the feminine subscale (x=100.85) was higher than the nonreticent mean (x=93.47). The approximated t ratio revealed that this difference was significant at the criterion level (t=2.35, df=128.9, p=.02). The null hypothesis was not accepted.

As a planned validity step, the social desirability subscale was tested to see if the two groups differed in how they responded to the items. Bem (1974) included the social desirability subscale as a check for possible response sets. She argued, "because of the fact that the masculine and feminine items are all relatively desirable, even for an 'inappropriate' sex, it is important to verify that the Androgyny score is not simply tapping a social desirability response set" (p. 159). An approximated t ratio was calculated to determine if the two groups differentially endorsed these items. A significant difference would indicate that the two groups may have seen the "desirability" of the items differently. Because the desire was to err on the side of conservatism, the criterion level was reduced to $p<.1$ for this validity step. The results of the t proved not to be significant (t=1.44, df=130.04, p=.153). If the two groups were responding to the desirableness of the items, they tended not to do so differentially.

The final area of inquiry was an exploration of the items on the BSRI which might be able to help predict reticence. A discriminate function analysis with step wise inclusion was performed utilizing all 60 BSRI items as predictor

variables. After 35 steps, 29 items remained providing a high degree of separation (Wilkes lambda =.298) and a canonical correlation of .838. Table 2 lists the standardized canonical discriminate factor coefficients. Classification based upon 25 items correctly assigns 92.2% of the individuals to their appropriate category (see Table 3). The use of the items correctly predicted 94.6% of the reticent students.

DISCUSSION

All three levels of analysis, in varying degrees, suggest an important relationship between a deficiency in the constellation of masculine traits and reticence. Additionally, there seems to be evidence, though not as strong, of a link between the constellation of feminine traits and reticence.

Results of the cross classification procedure may be interpreted as supportive of the importance of the masculine traits and nonreticence. Nonreticent students tended to be categorized as masculine--high masculine, low feminine subscale scores--and androgynous--high masculinity, high femininity subscale scores. The reticent students exhibited low masculine subscale scores in general by being disproportionately categorized in the feminine--low masculine, high feminine subscale scores--or undifferentiated--low masculine, low feminine subscale scores--categories. Reticence does not appear to be linked to femininity in this analysis as only one of the two groups contains a high feminine component. The key element appears to be the presence or absence of high masculinity. Those who do not demonstrate reticence generally have the high masculine component. Those who do demonstrate reticence are missing the hi e component.

nalysis of the separate subscale scores reinforce the importance of defici masculinity scores and nonreticence. As predicted, the nonreticents

demonstrated a higher mean score on the masculine subscale than the reticents. One unexpected finding was the difference on the feminine subscale. This suggests that those items which are linked with femininity may be more important than first suspected.

The evidence from the discriminant analysis is not as clearly supportive as the previous two analyses. It was expected that those items associated with reticence would be primarily from the masculine scale and those with reticence drawn from the feminine and social desirability subscales. A count of the discriminate functions was conducted to find which subscales contributed more items to the positive and negative side of the function. The number of masculine and feminine items for the positive coefficients was the same, six. The number of items from the social desirability subscale was four. Negative coefficient functions drew more heavily from the social desirability subscale with seven and three each from the masculinity and femininity subscales. The most important item based on standardized canonical discriminate factor coefficient was the function "Masculine" which equaled 1.11.

The various analyses are suggestive that similar to Taylor's and Hall's (1982) "mental health indicators," nonreticence is related most closely with those traits labeled as masculine. While the evidence is revealing, the direction of the relationship is still unknown. The argument that the lack of certain traits within the behavioral repertoire of an individual causes a failure to develop the necessary communication skills either through absence of cognitive correlates or a lack of fundamental behaviors is as intuitively satisfying as suggesting that the lack of communication skills preclude an individual from practicing those fundamental behaviors. Future research may offer insights on the direction of the causality.

The ability to successfully predict reticent from nonreticent students

based on the discriminant analysis suggests that a screening instrument may be possible to assist in the diagnosis of reticence. While the development of such a scale could never replace the role of a trained observer, it might provide a means for conducting initial screenings and finding those individuals who slip through the system untreated. More work in this area is recommended.

FOOTNOTES

[1]This argument is somewhat reminiscent of the attitude versus behavior controversy in persuasion research of the last two decades. Those responses which were elicited by paper-and-pencil "attitude scales" represented a person's attitude. Nonpaper-and-pencil operationalizations were considered behavioral. This obscures that fact that each is a behavioral measure as are all measures. Thus, "behavioral" has been set off in quotes to note that it is behavioral in the sense that it is not a paper-and-pencil operationalization.

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TABLE 1

Sex Role Breakout by Communication Group

	Reticents	Nonreticents	Totals
Masculine	6	25	31
	10.0%	32.5%	
Feminine	24	8	32
	40.0%	10.4%	
Androgynous	10	28	38
	16.7%	36.4%	
Undifferentiated	20	16	36
	33.3%	20.8%	
Totals	60	77	137
	100.0%	100.1	

$\underline{x}^2$=26.92, df=3, p .0001 V=.443

TABLE 2

Standardized Canonical Discriminant

Function Coefficients

Coefficient	Entered	Item	Subscale
-.583	2	Secretive	S
.417	3	Willing to take a stand	M
-.490	4	Warm	F
.429	5	Gullible	F
.758	6	Understanding	F
1.114	7	Masculine	M
.552	8	Self sufficient	M
-.196	9	Unpredictable	S
.270	10	Makes decisions easily	M
.465	11	Theatrical	S
.684	12	Have leadership ability	M
-.225	13	Analytical	M
-.583	14	Tactful	S
.568	15	Truthful	S
-.313	16	Sincere	S
.460	17	Jealous	S
.643	18	Feminine	F
-.417	20	Athletic	M
.420	22	Willing to take a stand	M
.547	23	Childlike	F

TABLE 2 (cont)

Coefficient	Entered	Item	Subscale
-.574	24	Solemn	S
-.464	25	Flatterable	F
.226	26	Does not use harsh language	F
.413	27	Yielding	F
-.247	28	Individualistic	M
-.225	29	Affectionate	F
-.368	30	Inefficient	S
-.352	32	Reliable	S
.264	35	Conventional	S

TABLE 3

Classification Based on Discriminant Analysis

		Predicted	
		Reticents	Nonreticents
Actual	Reticents	53	3
		94.6%	5.4%
	Nonreticents	6	53
		10.2%	89.8%

Cases correctly classified are 92.2%